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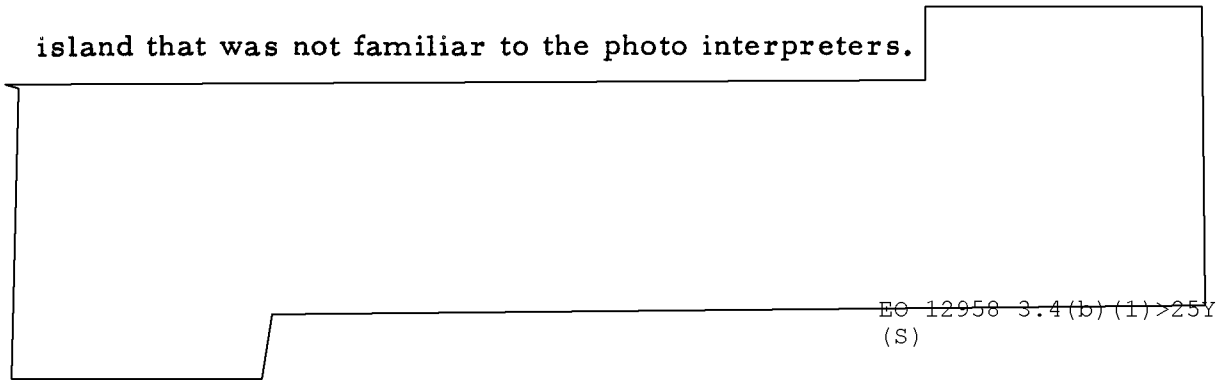
SECRET

27 February 1963

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: U-2 Overflights of Cuba, 29 August through 14 October 1962

The August 29th flight flew over most of the island and photographed much of it. The photography revealed that eight SAM sites were under construction in the western half of the island. The flight also discovered an installation at Banes in the eastern end of the island that was not familiar to the photo interpreters.



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The finding of SA-2's in Cuba on the August 29th flight presented us with a new problem in planning U-2 flights over Cuba.

Today, there is general acceptance of the fact that we are carrying out overhead reconnaissance of Cuba and that we will continue to do so as long as our national security requires it. This almost universal approval of U-2 flights over Cuba is an attitude that has existed only since the middle of last October. Prior to the finding of offensive ballistic missiles in Cuba, quite a different public attitude existed.

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In planning for any U-2 operations over well-defended, denied territory we were always aware of criticism that attended the U-2 incident over the USSR in May of 1960.

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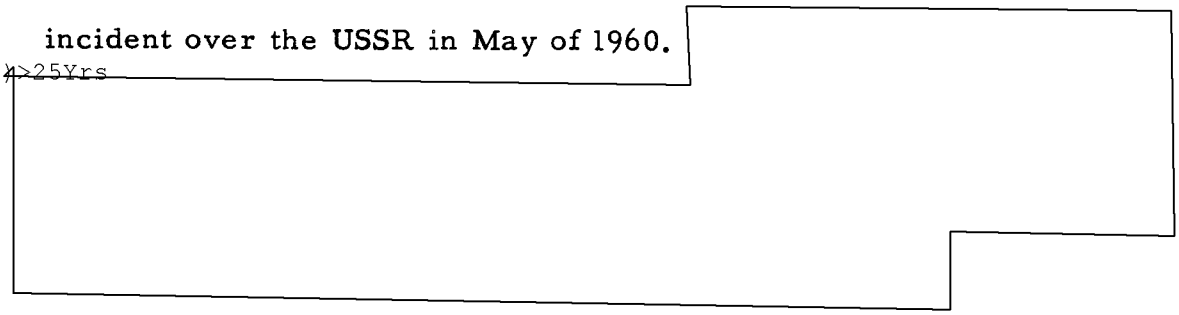

Within the intelligence community there was always at the backs of our minds the knowledge that in the event of a mishap we would have to be able to explain, convincingly and in detail, the justification--in terms of the highest priority intelligence needs--for having undertaken the mission.

Elsewhere in Government and among persons whose stated views strongly influence public opinion there were serious reservations regarding the use of the U-2. There were expressions of extreme concern from some public leaders over the increase in tension that might result from overflights, and others voiced the opinion that such flights were illegal or immoral. Although many public figures conceded the necessity of the United States securing intelligence by whatever means required, they were quick to caution that the use of the U-2 was quite a different matter from the classical use of spies and agents.

The vulnerability of the U-2 to Soviet SA-2 systems and the discovery of those systems in Cuba contributed further complicating factors in weighing risks against the need for hard intelligence.

The situation as of September 1962 must be viewed against this background of universal repugnance, or, at the very least, extreme uneasiness regarding overflights.

Because of the widespread apprehension over use of the U-2, we took particular care to ensure that each flight produced the maximum of information of value to the entire intelligence community. Each track was drawn to cover high priority targets agreed upon by an inter-agency group known as the Committee on Overhead Reconnaissance, a committee of the United States Intelligence Board.

We were also concerned with the conservation of the asset. The U-2 is not a sturdily-built aircraft. It is designed for one purpose--long flights at very high altitudes and at relatively low speeds. We had very few of these planes. Therefore, before we committed one to a mission we wanted to be absolutely certain that the intelligence need was great enough to justify the risk of loss of the pilot and aircraft. The Committee on Overhead Reconnaissance was the intelligence community's vehicle for making the target studies.

All CIA overflights were programmed through the medium of the CIA Monthly Forecast. At the time the Soviet arms build-up

began in Cuba, flights over Cuba were being forecast and flown at the rate of two per month.

Because of the need to husband our resources and to ensure that highest quality photography was obtained from each U-2 flight, it was the practice not to launch a mission unless weather over most of the critical targets was predicted to be less than 25 per cent overcast.

After reviewing the result of the August 29th mission, the Committee on Overhead Reconnaissance, in undeniably good judgment, recommended that the next mission should cover those areas of the island which were not photographed on the August 29th flight and that particular attention should be paid to the then unidentified site at Banes. It was important to learn whether the Soviets had made a limited deployment of SA-2's to Cuba or whether an island-wide defense was being built.

The next mission was successfully flown on schedule on September 5th over the eastern and central portions of the island. Three additional SAM sites were detected in the central portion of the island. Unfortunately, the flight encountered heavy cloud cover over eastern Cuba.

Late in August, Mr. McCone suggested to General Carter, who was acting as DCI during Mr. McCone's absence, that low-level

reconnaissance of Cuba be proposed. General Carter requested the Committee on Overhead Reconnaissance to consider the kind of information that could be obtained thus. The Committee met on September first and third and reported its views on what might be accomplished through low-level flights.

As a result of the Committee's deliberations and because of the heavy cloud cover encountered over eastern Cuba on the September 5th mission, General Carter, on September 10th, 1962, addressed a memorandum to the Secretary of Defense recommending that the Secretary initiate the necessary action to provide for employment of tactical-type reconnaissance against Banes, which was still unidentified, or other targets identified by the Committee on Overhead Reconnaissance as being suitable for low-level reconnaissance. The Secretary of Defense felt it preferable not to mount a low-level reconnaissance of Banes until the results of CIA high-level reconnaissance became available.

Now, let us return to the matter of the September U-2 flights. One mission had already been flown on September 5th. One flight remained yet to be flown in September. A special meeting was held on September 10th to consider the specific track for that second flight.

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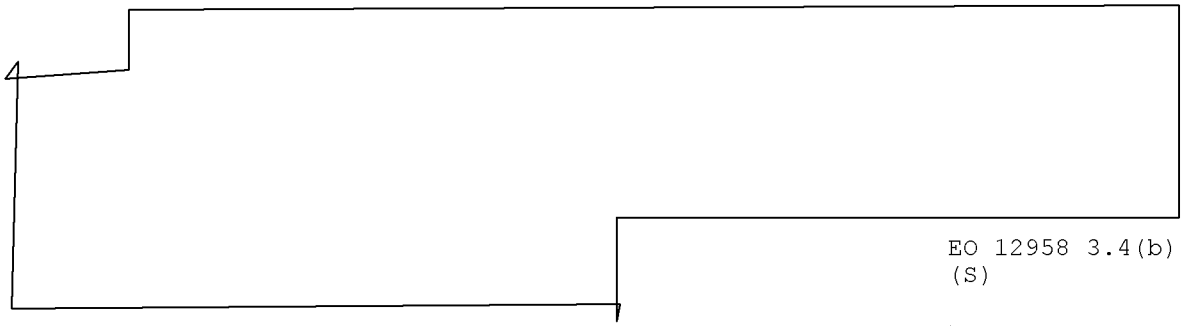
General Carter presented a CIA proposal for a single high-level flight designed specifically to photograph the Banes area, where earlier photography had not been conclusive, and generally to search for SAM sites in those areas of central and eastern Cuba that had not been covered since the September 5th flight.



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The Secretary of State expressed concern at CIA's planned coverage of Cuba, involving extensive peripheral coverage as well as two legs directly over Cuban air space, all in one flight. He said that he had no objection to the peripheral parts and, in fact, thought it useful to continue to establish our right to fly over international waters. On the other hand, he recognized the necessity of obtaining vertical coverage of the Isle of Pines and the eastern portion of Cuba. He felt, however, that it was unwise to combine extensive overflying of international waters with actual overflights. He pointed out that the long peripheral flight would draw undue attention to the mission and further that should the aircraft fall into enemy hands after an overflight had occurred, this would put the United States in a very poor position for standing on its rights to overfly international waters.

Taking these views into account the plan was changed and four flights were substituted for the one. Two flights were to be wholly peripheral, involving no land overflight. One was to cover the Isle of Pines, and the other was to overfly the eastern end of the island targeted against Banes and Guantanamo.

There was a three-week period from the 5th to the 26th of September during which only one flight was flown (on September 17th), and it yielded no useable photography. We finally acquired a moderately complete mosaic of the SA-2 defense of Cuba by piece-meal photography search carried out in late September and early October. The delay in completing the photographic coverage was due solely to the unfavorable weather predicted during this period.

Much of Cuba was under heavy cloud cover throughout most of September, and the cloud patterns were rapidly and continually changing. The few periods of acceptable weather were so fleeting that they had passed before flights could be mounted.

The weather was checked for a possible mission every day beginning on September 6th. There was a one- or two- day period around the middle of the month when the forecasts were moderately favorable. A flight to the northeast was scheduled for the 16th. It went to the final briefing on the 15th, but was delayed for 24 hours because of weather and was cancelled when the weather continued unfavorable. Planning for a flight over the Isle of Pines was under way on September 15th. At the final briefing on the 16th, the forecast remained favorable. The mission was flown on September 17th, but by then the weather had turned sour and no useable photography was acquired.

Another mission was under consideration between September 18th and 21st, but the weather was bad and the mission was cancelled.

The mission to cover the Guantanamo and Banes areas was under consideration beginning 22 September. It went to alert daily, but weather was not acceptable until the 26th. On that date the mission was successfully flown and three SAM sites were discovered. This was the first of the four flights agreed upon on September 10th, and

it was the first day on which weather permitted a successful flight.

One of the four tracks was originally approved to cover only the Isle of Pines. Mr. McCone called Mr. U. Alexis Johnson on September 28th and got approval to include coverage of the Bay of Pigs area. The flight was successfully flown on September 29th.

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Two of the three remaining missions for September were considered during the period September 29th through October 2nd. Both were cancelled because of bad weather.

The next flight under consideration was that along the periphery of the southeastern coast. It was delayed because of weather on October 3rd. It was briefed on October 4th and successfully flew the mission on the 5th. One additional SAM site was discovered.

There was good weather along the northeastern coast on October 6th. A flight was launched but it aborted because of aircraft fuel problems.

The flight along the northeastern coast was successfully flown the next day, October 7th. Four more SAM sites were discovered.

The mission of October 7th completed the September flight program.

As the September overflight program progressed, identifying additional SAM sites, it became apparent that an island-wide SA-2 defense was being constructed. The next step was to discover how far advanced the earlier SAM sites were. This information could be obtained only by taking the risk of overflying an SA-2 site that might be operational.

At an interdepartmental group meeting on October 4th, the DCI made a strong representation for extensive overflights of Cuba. The group requested NRO, JCS, and CIA to examine all alternative means of conducting aerial reconnaissance and to report back as soon as possible. A meeting was called on October 9th to hear this report, and at this meeting the flight was planned which was actually flown on the 14th of October.

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Additionally, from September 18th through October 2nd, [redacted] reports dovetailed sufficiently to create a suspicion that there was something of unusual importance going on in a definite area west of Havana and that this unusual activity might be concerned with MRBM's. These reports, however, were not of sufficient credibility to warrant their being used in intelligence publications. Accordingly, the track of the flight planned at the October 9th meeting to test the operational readiness of the known SAM sites was drawn to cover the area in which MRBM's were suspected.

The weather was checked daily on October 10th, 11th and 12th, but the forecasts were unfavorable. On October 12th, operational control of U-2 overflights of Cuba was transferred to the Strategic Air Command of the U.S. Air Force. The weather forecast continued unfavorable on October 13th. The mission was successfully flown by SAC on October 14th over the suspect area west of Havana and near the SAM site thought most likely to be operational. The flight was the first to discover the presence of MRBM's.

As of October 16th, blanket authority was given for unrestricted overflights of Cuba.

Attached at Tab A is a summary of weather forecasts and the status of missions, 5 September through 14 October 1962.